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*Media Statement*

## **Pūkaha Wildlife Centre to stay open after agreeing deal with iwi, creditors**

Pūkaha Mount Bruce Board has reached a heads of agreement with Rangitāne Tū Mai Rā which will allow the wildlife centre to stay open while both organisations work together on developing sustainable long-term business models.

Board Chair Shane McManaway and Rangitāne Tū Mai Rā Chair Sonya Rimene say that the agreement forged in recent days has brought Pūkaha back from the brink of closure and given it breathing space to focus on a positive future.

“The new board has worked tirelessly to save one of New Zealand’s most important conservation centres and sanctuaries for endangered wildlife from closure,” McManaway says.

“We’re thrilled to have an agreement that will keep the doors open to schools, tourists and other visitors while continuing our native species and forest conservation programmes.”

“Kei te manawanui katoa a Rangitāne ki tō mātau whenua taonga ki Pūkaha. For Rangitāne, our iwi is deeply committed to our whenua taonga at Pūkaha,” Ms Rimene says.

“Kei te harikoa katoa mātau kua whakatau take mātau ki te Poari o Pūkaha. We are delighted that we have been able to reach a heads of agreement with the Pūkaha Mt Bruce Board. It’s a win-win outcome that strengthens the connection to our whenua and to our Whare Wananga. We look forward to translating our heads of agreement into a formal arrangement as soon as possible,” Ms Rimene says.

Rescuing the 63-year-old centre from closure involved significant support from Rangitāne Tū Mai Rā, creditors, and the community.

“The result is that Pūkaha can substantially reduce its debt and debt servicing costs, which allows us to pay our creditors – who have been very patient - and free up capital needed to run a sustainable business,” McManaway says.

The new board gratefully acknowledges the support provided by:

- A significant arrangement with Rangitāne Tū Mai Rā which will result in debt reduction and help keep the centre open. In this arrangement, Rangitāne will assume the ownership and operations of the Whare Wānanga complex in return for meeting existing infrastructure debt and providing a working capital injection to the Pūkaha Mount Bruce Board.



- Tararua District Council for transferring the \$1 million council loan from Pūkaha Mount Bruce to Rangitāne Tū Mai Rā. The Council has also agreed to forego the interest of \$146,000 on the loan as part of the collective effort to ensure Pūkaha Mount Bruce remains operational.
- Central Energy Trust's magnificent gesture of converting a \$1 million loan into a grant.
- Masterton District Council providing a \$200,000 long-term loan.
- Trust House and other local funders who rallied to support Pūkaha.
- Department of Conservation for its support in keeping the conservation programmes operating.

McManaway also paid a huge tribute to Deputy Chair Bob Francis for his unwavering dedication, experience and support, and to Pūkaha staff for their commitment in times of uncertainty. And he thanked all in the community who had been supportive in helpful ways such as donating to a Give-a-Little page and visiting the wildlife centre.

"While we're hugely grateful for all the support to date, Pūkaha is not out of the woods completely. The next six months will be a challenge as the Board works to finalise the details of our arrangement with Rangitāne Tū Mai Rā and get the operating model more in line with the income stream, which will ensure ongoing viability.

"The Board alongside Rangitāne Tū Mai Rā is up for that challenge and 100 percent committed," McManaway says.

"Kua hiki ake a Rangitāne i te manuka, ka karawhiu i ngā mahi kei mua i te aroaro. Rangitāne has taken up the challenge and we are ready for the next phase of work" says Ms Rimene.

Department of Conservation Acting Director Angus Hulme-Moir said: "The Department of Conservation is thrilled that Pūkaha will continue its important conservation work and is looking forward to an ongoing and strong relationship with Pūkaha and Rangitāne Tū Mai Rā."

Margaret Kouvelis, Chair of the Central Energy Trust, said: "The Central Energy Trust considers it a privilege to support the Pūkaha Mount Bruce Trust in their endeavours to maintain and build on the centre, a national taonga for all people. We're confident about the direction of the new board and relationships with iwi. Working together we can achieve the outcomes that have been so sought after for so long,"

Media inquiries:

Graeme Peters, Silvereye Communications, 027 66 77 400 or [graeme@silvereye.co.nz](mailto:graeme@silvereye.co.nz)